

Governors Island, New York Arsenal  
Storehouse No. 1 (Building #104)  
Governors Island  
New York Harbor  
New York City  
New York County  
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-6B

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, NEW YORK ARSENAL, STOREHOUSE NO. 1 HABS No. NY-5715-6B  
(Building #104)

Location: The building is located on the north side of Andes Road, south of Building #125, east of Building #105, Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York, New York County, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupant: United States Coast Guard

Present Use: Offices

Significance: This building was constructed as a storehouse after the extension of the boundary line of the New York Arsenal to Andes Road was approved in 1849. At that time there was a critical need for more storage space. The building, which stands on a small rise, overlooked the the original main dock area and shifted the orientation of the arsenal from its earlier triangular configuration. It became a prominent landmark on the island as shown in historical photographs.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The date of construction was listed in a 1908 history of the arsenal as 1850. The building was constructed on land that became part of the arsenal in October 1849 when its boundary line was extended to present day Andes Road. (General Orders 51 of October 15, 1849).
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The War Department of the United States (called Department of the Army after 1947) owned the building until 1966 when Governors Island was transferred to the United States Coast Guard.

4. Builder: Construction work was probably done by civilian laborers under the direction of the Commanding Officer of the New York Arsenal (Inspection report, 1854).
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans have been located. The building first appeared on a 1857 map. It was depicted as a rectangular structure with a square projection on its east facade. A 1908 cost estimate of the building was \$7,931.41.

The storehouse with a clock tower was a common structure found in arsenal complexes. Similar buildings have been described at the Springfield Armory, the Frankford Arsenal and Rock Island Arsenal. In each case, as well as at Governors Island, a clock tower building was built as a storehouse and commanded a prominent position in the arsenal.

At the Governors Island, evidence suggests that the tower served a practical purpose reminiscent of early mill structures described in William Pierson, American Buildings and their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque, pp.44-49. The tower probably served as an enclosed area where ordnance stores could be hoisted up to the second floor because at the second story level between the tower and the main building is the same arched opening that is found on the first floor level.

6. Additions and alterations: The building served as a storehouse until 1882 when it was loaned to the Military Service Institution of the United States. At that time it was made into a museum with offices and a meeting room on the second floor. The molded tin wall covering of which remnants have been discovered in the northern end of the second floor may have been installed during this time.

The 1884 view of the building as a museum suggests what it may have looked like as a storehouse. (See HABS No. NY-5715-6B data page 10). What is most noticeable is the absence of windows on the second floor. Apparently the windows in the gable ends of the structure provided all the light and ventilation needed for a storehouse.

Between 1884 and 1895, windows were added in the second story level of Building #104 as shown in photographs taken between 1895 and 1904. (See HABS No. NY-5715-6B data pages 11-12)

Beams located in the southern end of the second story of the building show evidence of fire damage. Neither the date nor extent of this damage is known.

During the 1930s, the building was included in the Works Projects Administration on Governors Island. At that time the windows at the second story level were enlarged. The clock was set in a roundel with stone keystones. By this time the cresting rail at the roof line had been removed. (See HABS No. NY-5715-6B data page 13)

Between 1930 and 1956, dormers were added to the roof and the clock in the tower disappeared. Perhaps these changes occurred in the 1940s when the building served as the signal office. Some communications equipment is still to be found in the attic. The upper portion of the clock tower was converted into an office during this period.

B. Historical context:

The building was built by the Ordnance Department to increase storage space at New York Arsenal. Storage space, which was sufficient to supply Fort Jay in peace time, quickly became cramped since the arsenal was a natural depository for stores shipped through New York Harbor. There was little room for expansion on the island that would not encroach on the firing lines of Fort Columbus. Expansion was requested by Capt. Thornton in September 1847 when he submitted a proposal to the Adjutant General's Office. While this proposal was being studied, all the materials for the new storehouse were collected on site so that construction could begin once the site was finally selected. (Insection report, 1849). In October 1849, the boundaries of the New York Arsenal were expanded to include all the land north of present day Andes Road. On this land, the new storehouse was erected in 1850. The finished building was depicted on a map drawn in 1857.

The structure served as an ordnance storehouse until 1882 when it was loaned to the Military Service Institution of the United States for use as offices and a museum. This organization was founded in 1878 as a project of General Hancock and other concerned persons to improve the general understanding and public appreciation for the military organization, its development, and future needs. General Hancock had served as a Union General during the Civil War and became Commanding Officer of Fort Columbus in 1878. He was the unsuccessful Democratic Presidential nominee in 1880. The museum was closed in 1917 and its collections were given to the Smithsonian Institution.

After the Ordnance Department closed the New York Arsenal in 1920, the building was turned over to the Second Corps Area. During the 1930s, this building was used as the post office and, during World War II, it served as the signal office.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This building is a prominent structure in the New York Arsenal complex because of its location on the top of a hill and its three-story clock tower. It relates to the other buildings in the arsenal in its size, scale and building materials.
2. Condition of fabric: The exterior of the building is well preserved in its basic character.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The building is a rectangular brick building, 80'-3" (five-bay front) X 40'-2" with a projecting three-story square tower, 13'-8", on the east facade. The building is two-and-a-half stories tall.
2. Foundations: The foundation and water table are coursed granite ashlar.
3. Walls: The walls are brick, laid in common bond (five stretcher rows to one header row). There are brick belt courses between the first and second stories, and above the second story. The walls at the first story level are 12" thick and, at the attic level, 8-3/4 " thick.
4. Structural systems, framing: The walls are load-bearing masonry walls with an interior system of 10" steel lolly columns supporting 12" beams. Floor joists are 18" apart and have 2" x 14" wood supports. The roof framing is wood queen post truss.
5. Porches: At the base of the tower located on the east facade is a porch accessed through three brick archways. This was used as the main entrance to the museum. A sketch dated 1884 shows two of the openings left open while the third side was bricked in. In the 1985 renovation, this proch tower will be entirely enclosed.

There is a modern brick entrance porch along the west side of the building with a gabled shingle roof.

6. Chimneys: None.

7. Openings

- a. Doorways and doors: Along both the east and west facades are three archways outlined in brick; three more are located in the base of the clock tower on the east side. The doorways located in the building had wooden swing doors to allow for the movement of ordnance stores, but they have been filled in with wood panels and windows. The door into the enclosed entrance porch is a modern wood and glass paneled door.
- b. Windows: The windows located in the first story, in the gable ends and in the tower are six-over-six light double-hung sash windows with flat brick arches and stone sills. At the second story level along the east and west sides and at the northeast corner of the north gable end, the windows are paired six-over-six light double-hung sash. They have concrete sills and concrete has been applied to the brick string course above them to give the appearance of a lintel. At the southeast corner of the east side is one small six-over-six light double-hung sash window at the first story level and two four-light windows are located at the second story level. In the gable ends are semi-circular windows outlined in brick. They have granite sills. On the third story of the clock tower are two louvered openings with flat brick arches. There is also a round window, formerly a square opening for clock, which is outlined in brick with four stone keystones. The original wood windows and window frames have been replaced with aluminum replacements.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a asphalt shingled gable roof with later gabled dormers in east and west sides. The roof over the clock tower is a shallow hipped roof.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Along the eaves line is a brownstone cornice. This is continuous on the gable ends and forms a pediment with the raking cornice of the gable.

- C. Description of Interior: This structure was built as a storehouse and, as such, probably had open interior spaces. In the summer of 1985, this structure is undergoing extensive interior rehabilitation.
1. Floor plans: Unknown.
  2. Stairways: There is a central metal stairway between the first and second floors and a boxed-in wood-framed stairway between the second floor and the attic which is located in the southwest corner. Remnants of a stairway are located along the east facade to the north of the central door in the tower.
  3. Flooring: The floors are 18" thick concrete on brick footings.
  4. Wall and ceiling finish: The original walls were brick and may have been plastered over and painted. Their new interior wall finish will be modern paneling. On the northern end of the second floor remain parts of a molded tin wall covering consisting of wainscoting, diagonal diamond pattern on the walls and a Greek frieze and floral molding at the ceiling. This was nailed to a wooden framework applied over plastered brick walls. It probably dates from 1882 when the building was loaned to the Military Service Institution of the United States for use as a museum with offices and a meeting room on the second floor.
  5. Openings: All the exterior openings will be covered over by the new renovation.
    - a. Doorways and doors: At the center of the second story on the east facade is a brick archway similar to the openings at the first story level leading between the second story of the clock tower to the second story of the main building. This was probably used to hoist stores up the second level. There is a wood floor between the first and second stories of the clock tower which may have been a trap door at one time. There is a trap door in the ceiling of the second story of the tower.
    - b. Windows: The windows have all been replaced with aluminum framed windows and will not be visible from the interior.
  6. Decorative features and trim: Nothing original.
  7. Hardware: It will all be modern.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The building faces east towards the original wharf area. Originally it was a more prominent structure because of its location on top of a small rise. Building #104 is in harmony with the other arsenal buildings in its scale, building materials and use. That harmony was interrupted by the construction of Building #125, the Second Corps Area Headquarters, in 1934 just to the north. Although of brick construction, Building #125 disrupts the relationships between the old arsenal buildings in matters of scale.

Along the east and west sides of Building #104 are small parking lots. To the south is Andes Road.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Maps and architectural drawings:

The following documents are in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 77, Maps and Plans of the Office of the Chief of Engineers.

Copy of "Plan of Capt. Thornton" referred to in Adjts. General's letter of September 24, 1847 to Lt. Col. Talcott. Fortification File, Fort Jay, Drawer 37, sheet 45.

Map of a Survey of the shore of Governor's Island made under the direction of Major John G. Barnard, Corps of Engineers, 1857. Fortification File, Drawer 37, Plate 42.

Map of Governor's Island. Surveyed by Major John G. Barnard, Corps of Engineers, 1867. Fortification File, Drawer 37, sheet 55.

Map of Governor's Island. Surveyed by 1st Lieut. Eugene Graffin, Corps of Engineers and Frederick N. Owens Assistant Engineer, 1879. Fortification File, Drawer 37, sheet 63.

Map showing location of Water, Drain and Sewer Pipes on Governors Island. Office of the Post Quartermaster, Fort Columbus, 1879. Traced Nov. 1884. Miscellaneous Forts File, Series A, Fort Columbus.

The following plans were available from Facilities Engineering, New York Support Center, Governors Island, New York, New York:

Army Record Drawing, 1956.



B. Views

Plate in Military Service Institution of the United States, The Catalog of the Museum, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1884.

Photographs:

East side, ca. 1895-1904. National Archives, Still Pictures Branch, RG 165-FF-71-1.

East side, ca. 1895-1904. National Archives, Still Pictures Branch, RG 165-FF-71-593.

Photo, 1884-1900, published in Governors Island Guide, U.S. Coast Guard, 1978 Revision.

Works Program Administration photographs, Special Services, New York Support Center, Building #110, Governors Island, New York, New York.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

The following sources are located in the Navy and Old Army Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 156, Ordnance Department, Box 1003.

Inspection report of New York Depot July 13, 1849 by H.K. Craig, Lt. Colonel Ordnance and Inspector.

Reports of Inspections of Rome Arsenal, Watervliet and New York Arsenal by S. Churchill, Inspector General, 14 January 1854.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Fort Jay, Governors Island, New York. A Master Plan and Program for Future Development by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, 1945.

John Milner Associates. Historical and Archeological Survey of Frankford Arsenal, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. 1979.

MacDonald and Mack Partnership. Historic Properties Report: Rock Island Arsenal. Rock Island, Illinois, February 1985.

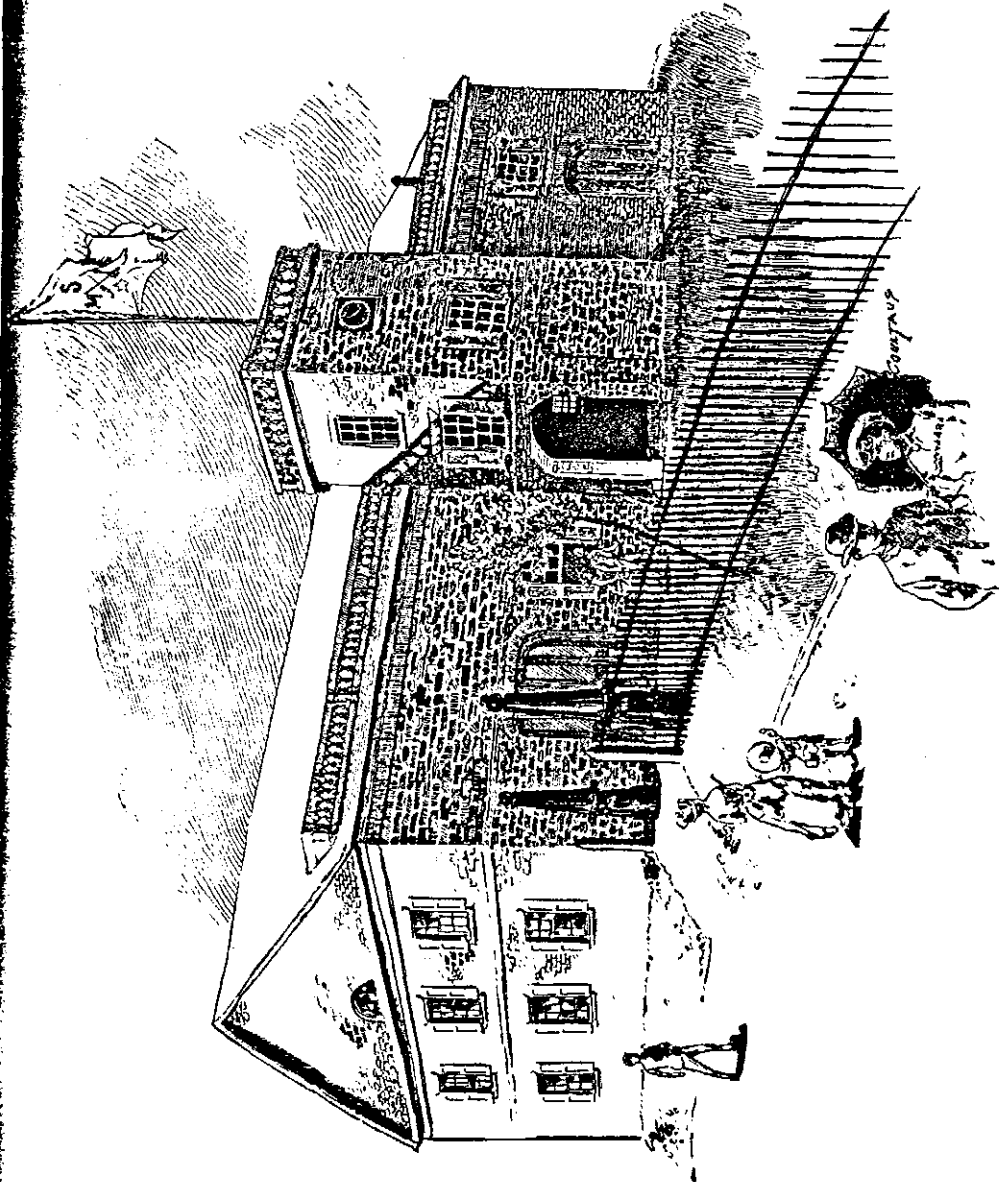
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National Archives, Navy and Old Army Branch. "New York Arsenal, Governors' Island". Report on History of New York ARsenal prepared for Chief of Ordnance, U.S. Army, Washington, D.C., October 15, 1908.

Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service. Springfield Armory. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1967.

Pierson, William H., Jr. American Buildings and their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1978.

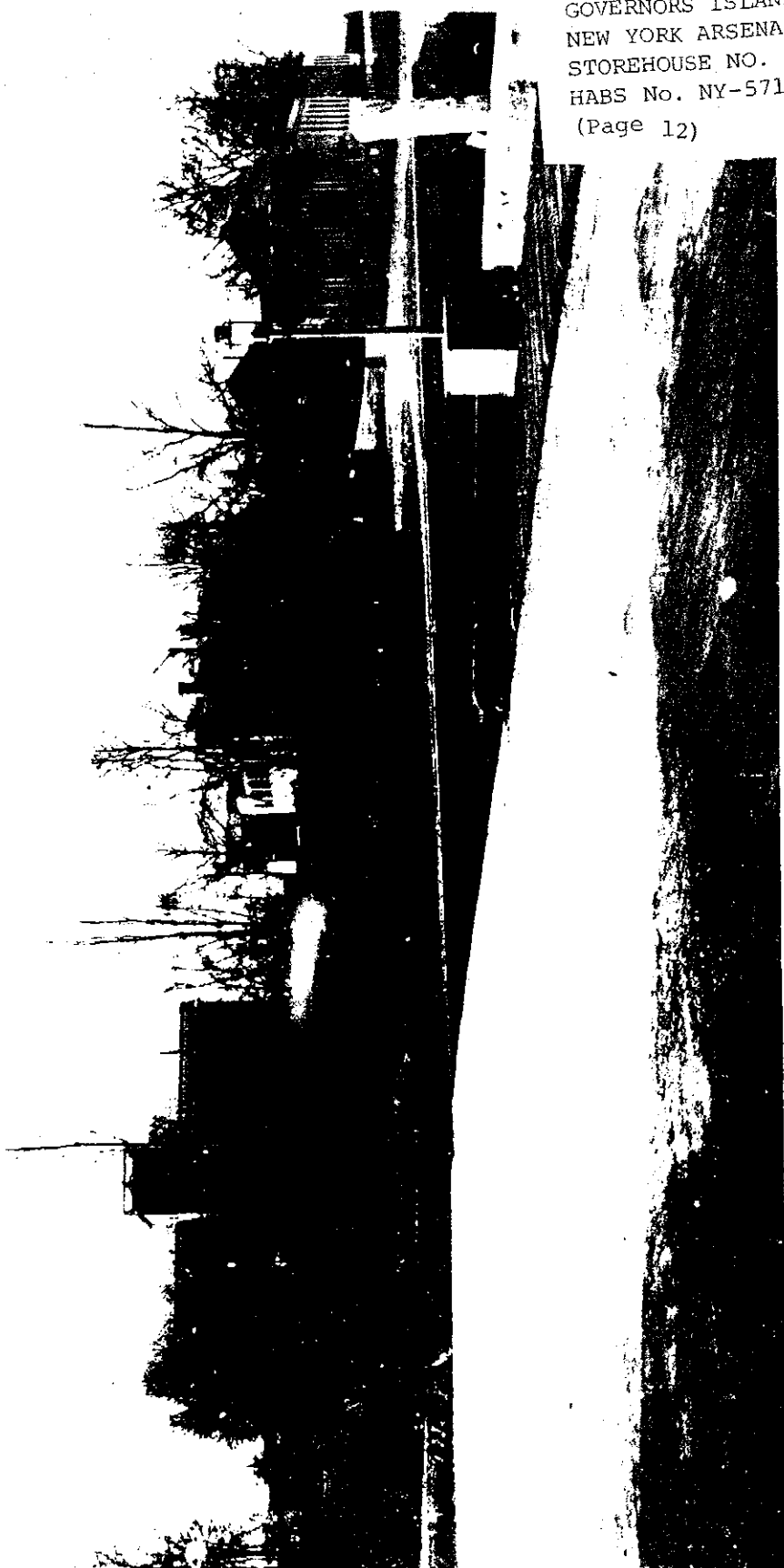
Smith, Edmund Banks. Governors Island: Its History Under Three Flags. New York: Valentine's Manual, Inc., 1923.



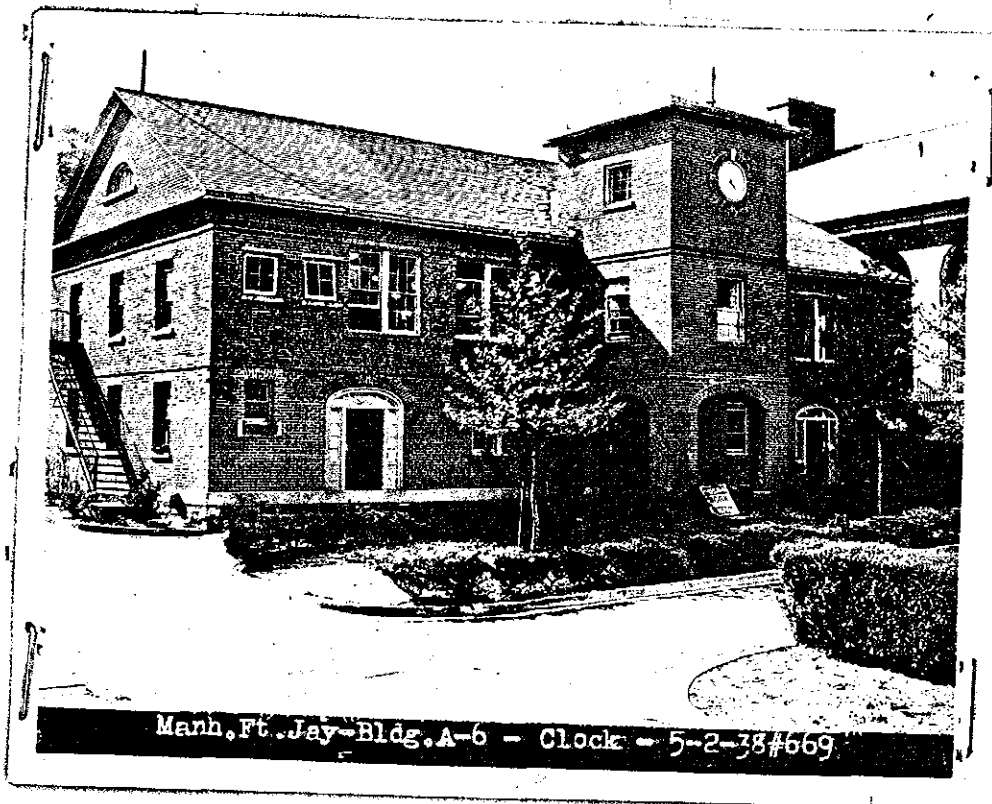
THE MUSEUM OF THE MILITARY SERVICE INSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES,  
GOVERNOR'S ISLAND, NEW YORK HARBOR.



Photocopy of New York Arsenal  
National Archives, Still Photos Division  
Records of War Department, General Staff  
Prints: American Forts, 1860-1914  
Record Group 165-Fortifications File-592  
ca. 1895-1904



Reprint of a New York Arsenal Photograph  
National Archives, Still Photos Division  
Records of War Department, General Staff  
Prints: American Forts, 1860-1914  
Record Group 165-Fortifications File-71-593  
ca. 1895-1904



Photograph dated May 1938 showing WPA work completed on  
Building #104.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. It is an addition to work accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. This entailed an historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and documentation of five properties which was completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory were transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984. This project is to document a select list of structures including the New York Arsenal.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard. Katherine Grandine was project historian.